



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 10th June at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Wiltshire	Richard Gwyer (RG)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)		

Apologies: Rob Procter (Oxfordshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 20th May meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3a: Experiences of Online Bridge

2. **MP** reported that in Suffolk two clubs were planning to run hybrid events with face-to-face and online sessions simultaneously, and the CBA was planning a meeting of all clubs in July to discuss such matters.
3. **DB** reported that one (learners') club had abandoned its RealBridge session because of the number of disconnects the players had been experiencing. **KT** reported disconnect problems also, but said that many of the occurrences were often the same players. **JF** reported that individual help had overcome these problems for some Hampshire players. A new release of RealBridge is being launched today.
4. **RG** reported a problem with BBO's choice of movements, and was reminded that for any non-standard movements BBO requires that the host for the event (usually the vEBU... account) must be logged in at the time the event starts, even if it is others who will TD the event.
5. Only one attempt at use of BBO video was reported, and in that case the club found that many players' systems became so slow, they gave up on it.

ITEM 3b: Returning to Face-to-Face Bridge

6. Reports were given of some clubs planning to restart in the week of 21st June (eg Bristol BC whose survey of members found >50% keen to return), but others were looking to a little later. Feedback suggests some hesitancy amongst players in returning. **MW** pointed out that we should not expect that what happens in bridge clubs in the future is identical to pre-pandemic behaviours.
7. There was curiosity about the new Pianola Play hybrid game, but no new information.

ITEM 3c: Bridge after Normality returns

8. **PS** expressed the view that for Gloucestershire County, the dominant form of bridge game would remain online with face-to-face encounters representing perhaps a quarter of the regular games; this is driven by the geographical spread of the players and their positive comfort levels with online play. **DB** suggested that in Leicestershire the finances of face-to-face games would become an issue.
9. **MP** reported that many counties were pleased to have their Green Point events online, and that the calendar for these might need to be revised because geography was no longer a barrier to clashes. **PS** expressed concern that too many Green Point events and hence the availability of too many Green Points, would devalue them.
10. The first county congress we could identify as face-to-face is the West of England event (in Weston) in early October. **MW** reported that Worcestershire was planning its late October congress to be online, and suggested that planning for face-to-face was a risky venture. **KH** told us that Lincolnshire, after running one online, is planning its first ever face-to-face Green Point congress next March.

ITEM 3d: Experiences around Online Cheating

11. **MT** expressed concerns around the standard of evidence in cheating cases and the use of “to the comfortable satisfaction of” as a standard of proof. **PS** reminded us that this was an approach used by the CAS (Council for Arbitration in Sport) and was a compromise between “on the balance of probabilities” and “beyond reasonable doubt”. **KT** reported being observer in the past in a case where the evidence being presented which was of a seriously inadequate standard (cherry picking of hands was the issue). **KH** asked if the EBU methodology and standards are published.
12. **PC** expressed concern at the length of time that the process had taken in some recent examples on the EBU website, and **PS** pointed out that in many cases it was the defendant who had used the established process to their supposed benefit and caused that delay. It was also an issue that investigations were all done by volunteers and they might have to put a lot of time into that.
13. **MV** reported on the approach taken by Bridge Club Live, which simply expels relevant players and has avoided a “name and shame” approach because of the potential legal ramifications. It was noted that there is value in the public approach (as a deterrent) but it is possible for it to have very unwanted but unforeseen consequences (for example if someone self-harms as a result) and might do more harm to the game as a whole (by deterring newcomers). The circumstances of those being named (an elderly couple slipping into cheating being different from a professional beefing up his/her performance and reputation) is taken into account in sentencing, but might merit being taken into account in deciding on publicity. It was requested that these thoughts be fed back to the EBU Board.

14. **FD** reminded us that the bulk of players play for enjoyment and suggested that there were many forms of bad behaviour, but strong enforcement is only appropriate in the most competitive games (although counter-examples exist). The fact that a partnership game such as bridge is more vulnerable than other games to cheating is an unfortunate fact of life, as noted by **KH**.
15. **JF** asked how many cheaters we thought there were, and **PS** reported the pronouncement by Nicholas Hammond that his (well-respected) statistics suggest 3-5% are cheating in every ACBL game.

ITEM 3e: The Future of Teaching

16. **PS** reminded us that we have probably lost 12 months' worth of newcomers to the game with the cutbacks he has seen in teaching newcomers which has happened since the pandemic arrived. This suggested a major thrust would be required to avoid a serious decline in player numbers over the next few years. Some of those present were able to report that teaching in their location was progressing much as it always did, but it was agreed that the general informal spread of the game had taken a hit.
17. Where teaching is happening it is mostly in smaller groups, and we need to see more of the style of the Yorkshire CBA initiative described by David Guild to move things forward. The lessons by Bernard Magee and Andrew Robson are well liked, but generally for improvers rather than beginners. These providers are working on a model of the style of the YCBA, with one teachers covering many, many students.
18. The fact that "Teaching the Teachers" is now happening, online, is a positive move forward.

ITEM 3f: The Midlands Counties Online League

19. **PS** reported that the agreed threesome (himself, Jim Parker & Richard Jephcott) has met and is developing a proposal which should emerge soon – and it is likely to suggest that the majority of the games are online.

ITEM 3d: The Midlands Inter-County 6-High Teams

20. **MW** had not received any entries yet, but reports suggested small numbers (if any) from many counties this time, and the feeling was that the time of year and plans for easing regulations were the main cause for this. A number of those present encouraged personal contact with 6-high players was the best way to get them involved, as they need reassurance that this game will be in their comfort zone.

ITEM 3e: Reactions to the EBU County Chairs Meeting

21. **MP** reported that the Suffolk representatives were very impressed with the presentations made. **PS** asked about the frequency of such meetings, and it was suggested that online made such meetings easier, and at times of change there was a case for more frequent meetings.

ITEM 4: Round-Robin from Counties

22. We did a quick round-robin but useful inputs had come already in discussion. Offline reports were -

- Derbyshire : a committee meeting is due next week to review the government guidelines and formulate the county's return to F2F bridge. There is a plan to survey county and club members over next few months to gather members' views on the return to F2F. Derbyshire is still playing 90% or more on BBO, with just one affiliated club playing on RealBridge.
- Herefordshire : one clubs (Marcle) plans to resume F2F bridge on Friday 25th June, (subject of course to notification of further restrictions by HMG). There will be an online Gloucestershire & Herefordshire Green Point event on the weekend of 24th and 25th July.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

23. **PS** pointed out the [BAMSA Conference](#) which is coming at the end of June. It is worth looking at the agenda for the early days which overlaps enormously with the discussions we have here.

24. **KS** (offline) asked that

- chairmen of the participating counties were reminded that the Midlands Challenge Bowl is to be played on Sunday June 27th and they need to confirm that payment due to HBA has been made and that the team lists have been submitted to Chris Chowney as requested.
- if any counties with clubs running online pairs sessions are happy to accept ad hoc entries from non-members, please advise Keith as HCBA has a couple of requests for this as there is no such provision in Herefordshire.

25. We agreed the next meeting will be in four weeks' time, on Thursday 8th July. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES